CONFERENCE ON DISARMAMENT

CD/PV.825
27 May 1999

ENGLISH

FINAL RECORD OF THE EIGHT HUNDRED AND TWENTY-FIFTH PLENARY MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Thursday, 27 May 1999, at 10.20 a.m.

President: Mr. Mohamed-Salah Dembri (Algeria)

GE.99-61904 (E)

The PRESIDENT (translated from French): I declare open the 825th plenary meeting of the Conference on Disarmament.

First of all, on behalf of all of us, I would like to extend a cordial welcome to Mr. Stephen Gomersall, Director of International Security in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, who will be addressing the Conference today. On my list of speakers for today I have the representatives of Ireland, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and China.

Allow me to make a few introductory remarks.

(continued in Arabic)

Algeria is honoured to preside over the Conference on Disarmament and knows that this honour confers upon its incumbent a major responsibility. All of us here know that our work for some time now has been taking place in a historic context which is open to factual and evolving realities that are interwoven and difficult to fathom. It also clearly reveals the lofty aspirations and the various obstacles which, from time to time, hamper the adoption of uniform approaches to universal issues. This means that our collective ingenuity is called upon to help to find appropriate solutions to challenges that we must face together and which, far from hampering our work, should stimulate initiative in this forum. Today, we must acknowledge that, after 12 weeks of work, that is, half of the session, and despite the early approval of our agenda, we have not been able to agree on a programme of work that would enable us to embark on negotiations and press on with our work. The praiseworthy and consistent efforts made by my predecessors, Ambassadors Grey of the United States, Cedeño of Venezuela and Binh of Viet Nam, whose personal commitment I wish to commend, were insufficient to preserve the CD from this anachronistic phenomenon of deadlock in its work, not because of the complexity of the negotiations but due to the fact that they have not begun. This situation, as we all know, is attributable not only to procedural reasons relating to our rules of procedure but also to deep-rooted political reasons and conflicting concepts of the parameters of international security.

(continued in French)

Consequently, it would be appropriate today, after 12 weeks of deliberations, discussions, consultations, to establish that, despite the absence of a programme of work midway through the present session, this intensive and necessary dialogue carries in itself the potential for a decisive breakthrough, if we acknowledge that three elements have fertilized our collective démarche:

Firstly, a necessarily more enhanced understanding by all delegations of each other's positions on all the items before the Conference on Disarmament.

(The President)

Secondly, an undoubtedly rich background documentation, comprising general or specific proposals on certain items, put forward by Presidents, delegations or groups of delegations - proposals which offer avenues, choices and options open to negotiation.

Thirdly, a recognized awareness of the urgent need for the Conference on Disarmament to devote itself without further ado to negotiating and conducting substantive work, thus fulfilling the mandate entrusted to it by the international community as the sole multilateral disarmament negotiating forum.

It is these to my mind positive factors that I shall strive to capitalize, tap and render productive. To this end, I shall of course need everyone's support, on which I already know I can count, as well as the sense of compromise of each of us, which also, I readily believe, will not be lacking. To this end, I shall use the most wide-ranging consultations, based on an open synthesis method, and I should like to assure all delegations here of the Chair's full and total availability for consultations.

This is why I intend to focus the efforts of the Chair on the following guidelines:

Firstly, to continue to pursue efforts on the basis of the progress and achievements recorded by my predecessors in the area of preparation for decision-making. These do exist, even if they have not been translated into practical results.

Secondly, to work without any prior assumptions on the alternatives, options and proposals put forward so far, in this tricky exercise of seeking consensus.

Thirdly, to base the consultations on the general tenor of any future decision we might take as well as the details of its drafting.

The Conference on Disarmament is acknowledged to be a receptacle towards which events and portentous trends that occur or take shape outside Geneva converge in order to influence it. Consequently, we must be mindful, for the purposes of the synthesis, the consistency of the approach, and an enlightened political reading, of the work accomplished at the last session of the United Nations Disarmament Commission, the third Preparatory Committee for the NPT, the Conference of Parties to the Ottawa Convention on anti-personnel mines, the status of the START process and developments related to the ABM Treaty, the prospects for the CTBT, the role of nuclear weapons on the eve of the third millennium, the content of strategic doctrines as well as the recent or ongoing conflicts, which, alas, remind us every day that mankind is not secure from wars and that it is far from having warded off the threat of apocalyptic conflicts.

All these elements assuredly have an impact on our work and on the Conference itself. Hence we must acknowledge that the Conference on Disarmament, because it is itself receptive to these developments, can in turn

(The President)

send out strong political signals to the international community, and it can do so only if it begins its work. It is this task which awaits us and which the Algerian presidency would like to pursue with all of you here, with your collective assistance.

I now call on the representative of Ireland, Ambassador Anderson.

Ms. ANDERSON (Ireland): Mr. President, it gives me great pleasure that, through an accident of circumstance, I am the first speaker to take the floor under your presidency. We are all very confident, knowing you well as we do, that yours will be a very determined and very purposeful presidency, and I wish you every success in the weeks ahead.

It is almost three years since the CD concluded the negotiation of the CTBT. Although a pause was inevitable after the traumatic ending of that negotiation, none of us envisaged that this body would remain becalmed for so long. During these three years, the strong post-cold-war impetus to negotiation in the CD, which had driven the Chemical Weapons Convention and CTBT negotiations, has gradually ebbed.

Internationally there have also been setbacks. START, the focal point of the nuclear disarmament process, has stalled. Strategic defence doctrines have been updated by new concepts which set out new rationales for the use of nuclear weapons. Long-standing arms control agreements, central to strategic balance and to the pursuit of nuclear disarmament, face uncertainties. Regional arms races, fuelled by the proliferation of advanced weapons technologies, have assumed a new dimension posing challenges to the global community. Two non-NPT States parties have proclaimed their nuclear status and sought to demonstrate it through nuclear testing and the launching of ballistic missiles.

Against this sombre background, the CD must consider its options. In practice, these options are limited. By default or by design, the CD is likely to find itself going down one of three paths. The first possibility is that the stalemate of the past three years will continue indefinitely. The second is that agreement will be forthcoming on a comprehensive work programme - a full package involving the inevitable share-out of satisfaction and sacrifice. The third option is agreement on a mini-package: getting down to work in areas where consensus exists and continuing consultations in areas where consensus has so far eluded us.

The first of these possibilities I mention only to dismiss it. The present stalemate simply cannot be allowed to continue - the opportunity cost to the international community is too high and the damage to the credibility of the CD is too great. The real political choice therefore lies between continuing to seek a comprehensive package or living with something more modest. We need to reflect on that choice.

(Ms. Anderson, Ireland)

Any attempt to situate ourselves must begin with the issue of nuclear disarmament. It has been clear for some time that the political question of the future approach to nuclear disarmament lies at the heart of our procedural difficulties.

United Nations General Assembly resolution 53/77 Y calls on the CD to establish an appropriate subsidiary body to deal with nuclear disarmament. The large majority of States voting in favour of this resolution demonstrates the strength of international support for such a body.

The title of the mechanism is ultimately irrelevant. What matters is its mandate and the scope this provides for dealing with substance. In our view, a CD mechanism on nuclear disarmament - whether an ad hoc committee, a working group or some other formation - should answer to certain criteria. It should allow for the comprehensive examination of the issues from a negotiating perspective. Work under the mechanism should contribute to the consideration of the future multilateral efforts which will be required to achieve the elimination of nuclear weapons. The operation of the mechanism should be flexible enough to permit the presentation and consideration of proposals, either new or existing, for future multilateral negotiations on nuclear disarmament with a view to achieving a consensus on the way forward.

There has been no shortage of proposals for the establishment of a mechanism. The South African and Canadian proposals point towards what we consider to be a balanced and reasonable way forward; our support for the South African proposal was clearly registered from the outset. The proposal presented by Belgium on behalf of five countries also warrants further exploration. It could form the basis for the establishment of a mechanism which at least would place the issue of nuclear disarmament within a formal CD context. Progress on the basis of this proposal depends on the extent to which there is flexibility in relation to its scope.

Notwithstanding our strong support for the establishment of a mechanism, we have to acknowledge current realities. The fact is that a small number of States, for reasons which in our view have never been satisfactorily explained to the CD, reject the establishment of a meaningful mechanism on nuclear disarmament in this body at this stage. Despite the cross-regional support for such a mechanism, despite the assurances that its deliberations on nuclear disarmament would not impinge on the bilateral nuclear disarmament process, despite the safeguards provided by the rule of consensus in the CD and despite a continual lowering of ambitions in relation to the scope of work on nuclear disarmament, a consensus has not so far proved attainable.

It is against this background that exploration has begun of enhancing the Troika mechanism agreed in 1998. Various possibilities suggest themselves here. More prescriptive language could be included in the mandate of the Troika. The Troika could for example be obliged to hold a number of open-ended informal meetings and to present a written report at the end of each part of the CD. There might also be a built-in review which would commit the CD to examining alternative mechanisms should there be no progress in the Troika's consultations.

(Ms. Anderson, Ireland)

We welcome the important proposal presented to us last week by the United States, United Kingdom and France and particularly the spirit of compromise it seeks to convey. It is a positive development that these three countries seek to foster such a dialogue in the CD. The proposal in our view is deserving of careful study. Perhaps, in consultations, some useful clarifications could be given. There are three points in particular which arise. Firstly, under this proposal, the CD presidency would, inter alia, consult on ways and means of establishing an exchange of information and views within the Conference on endeavours towards nuclear disarmament. Would the presidency also hold open-ended consultations on other nuclear disarmament proposals such as those of South Africa, Canada, Egypt and the G21?

Secondly, consultations on ways and means of establishing an exchange appears to imply "talks about talks" rather than "a dialogue on substantive endeavours". Could this proposal be amended to read simply "an exchange of information and views within the Conference on endeavours towards nuclear disarmament", thereby removing the procedural aspect of the discussion and going straight to substance?

Thirdly, the proposal implicitly gives two tasks to the Presidential Troika. The first is to have consultations on the establishment of an exchange of information and views. The second is to consult on methods and approaches for dealing with agenda item 1. Might the carrying out of this first task be seen as prejudging the outcome of the second task?

Clarification on these points would help to develop a dialogue around this proposal, which, as I have said, deserves our close attention.

It may be that, with further clarification and dialogue, it will prove possible to build on this latest proposal in a way which holds promise of meaningful progress. This could, however, take some time and it would seem difficult at this stage to predict the outcome. There will be an understandable emphasis on ensuring that there is substance to what is on offer. For our part, we are conscious of the importance of not risking the discussions on the handling of nuclear disarmament in the interest of securing an early overall package. This issue is of such central importance that the CD must make every effort to achieve a meaningful approach acceptable to all delegations.

If very early agreement is not forthcoming, we feel there is much to be said for launching negotiations on work in those areas where consensus already exists while continuing to seek consensus on the handling of nuclear disarmament in parallel.

Many delegations may feel that such an approach would not make negotiating sense; that it might help to bring about a situation where work went ahead in other areas whereas work on the priority issue of nuclear disarmament simply languished. While this risk cannot be ignored, a negotiating process is rarely without safety nets. Despite all our - rightful - disavowal of linkages, the reality facing us is that the overall negotiating climate in this body is and will remain conditioned by the extent

(Ms. Anderson, Ireland)

to which the nuclear disarmament agenda is being seriously addressed. In what kind of atmosphere would the Conference operate next year if there should be continued failure to reach consensus on addressing nuclear disarmament? And apart from the situation within the CD, there is also the wider context to consider. My delegation cedes to no one in recognizing the particular vocation of this body and in urging that it fulfil that vocation. The CD is undoubtedly the most appropriate body to initiate meaningful work on nuclear disarmament. But if the CD continues to show no sign of rising to the challenge, is it not likely that many delegations will conclude that work on nuclear disarmament should move to another forum which might hold out a better prospect of progress?

What are the other areas on which a clear consensus already exists and which could form components of a relatively modest package? There appear to be four such areas. First, fissile material negotiations. In August 1998 the CD agreed to establish an ad hoc committee to negotiate a treaty banning the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons and other nuclear explosive devices. United Nations General Assembly resolution 53/77 I, adopted without a vote, called on the CD to re-establish this ad hoc committee "at the opening of its 1999 session". The conclusion must be that there is a CD consensus to establish this ad hoc committee and to embark on this negotiation. In our view the negotiation of a fissile material treaty, despite the relatively narrow scope of the Shannon mandate, will inevitably have to take into account wider issues relevant to the future path towards the elimination of nuclear weapons. In some respects, much of substance of the CD debate surrounding the establishment of a mechanism to deal with nuclear disarmament will arise in the fissile material negotiations. The proposed work programme presented by the United States, United Kingdom and France suggested that, in view of the United Nations consensus on the need for this negotiation, once established the ad hoc committee should not rely on an annual re-authorization but should remain in existence until its work is completed. In effect the proposal envisages decoupling the fissile material negotiation from the annual negotiation of the work programme through the automaticity clause in the decision establishing the ad hoc committee. We have considerable sympathy with the general principle that once a negotiation gets under way it should be let continue without the need for an annual decision to re-establish the ad hoc committee. Nationally, we see the attraction of the approach outlined by the three States last week. However, under the current conditions in the CD and given the deep-seated differences over the work programme, and in particular on the handling of nuclear disarmament, it might be preferable to resume discussion of this general principle under the guidance of the relevant Special Coordinator. To seek to attach the principle to one specific negotiation before its general acceptance and before amendments to the rules of procedure have been agreed may only ultimately serve to complicate or even delay the early resumption of work in the ad hoc committee.

Second, security assurances. The report of the ad hoc committee on security assurances established in 1998 recommended, by consensus, that the ad hoc committee should be re-established in 1999. While Ireland shares the

(Ms. Anderson, Ireland)

scepticism of some about the potential usefulness of work on this issue in this forum, there would appear to be a CD consensus to re-establish this committee.

Third, special coordinators on reform issues. Within the CD there is, so far as we can see, no opposition to the appointment of special coordinators on the review of the CD's agenda, its improved and efficient functioning and the expansion of its membership. I will revert in a moment to the proposal on the table for the admission of five new members.

Fourth, transparency in armaments. There would also appear to be a continuing consensus in the CD on the appointment of a special coordinator on transparency in armaments.

There are two further areas where the position is somewhat less clear-cut and I would like to comment on them briefly. On APLs, we are aware of the strong interest on the part of a large number of delegations in re-appointing a special coordinator on APLs. We have stated before that if work by the CD in this area serves to assist the universalization of the Ottawa Convention we would have no difficulty in going ahead.

On outer space, Ireland believes that the CD should embark on the negotiation of a convention on the non-weaponization of outer space as proposed by Canada. The mandate for an ad hoc committee proposed by China also deserves serious study. However we recognize that further consultations and discussions will be required before the CD can reach consensus on the negotiating mandate for an ad hoc committee. In 1998 the CD appointed a Special Coordinator "to seek the views of its members on the most appropriate way to deal with the questions related to this item". In view of the wide support for the launching of negotiations and the proposals which have been tabled in 1999, the mandate of the Special Coordinator should be adjusted to take these proposals into account. We look forward to the early agreement of the CD on the appointment of a Special Coordinator on outer space whose consultations should facilitate the early establishment of an ad hoc committee.

Finally, it is impossible that I should conclude without referring to the proposal in CD/1567 of 2 February to admit Ecuador, Ireland, Kazakhstan, Malaysia and Tunisia to the Conference.

This proposal is unfinished business from the efforts of the Special Coordinators on CD expansion in 1997 and 1998. At the end of the 1998 CD session the CD was, as one Ambassador accurately described it, "within a hair's breadth" of reaching consensus to admit these five new members. I cannot conceal our disappointment that this has not so far happened.

We know the public and private history of the delay. We are aware that the views of all of the five on all issues are not congenial to everyone. But we also know that the vast majority of the CD membership believes that the

(Ms. Anderson, Ireland)

CD should be an inclusive body in which all views are fully represented. This point was eloquently made by the distinguished former Ambassador of Pakistan in his valedictory statement to the CD in March 1995, when he said:

> "... It does not matter if there are differences of opinion here; difference of opinion is the essence of democracy. We all learn from the opinions of others, and it is in adjusting to the opinions of others that we do not weaken ourselves individually but we strengthen ourselves collectively".

As the CD begins further efforts to launch work in 1999, it is our strong hope that an agreement on the CD's work will be accompanied by a decision to admit the five. In this way the CD would recognize the outcome of the intensive work on expansion undertaken in 1997 and 1998. It would simultaneously agree on the appointment of a new Special Coordinator to undertake consultations on the future expansion of the CD, after the admission of the five. Any other approach would be extraordinarily difficult for us to comprehend.

Over the past two years my delegation might have been tempted to abandon our interest in CD membership in the face of a succession of obstacles. We take inspiration from the great Indian poet Tagore who, describing the international aspirations of his own country, spoke of a world which "has not been broken into fragments by narrow domestic walls ... where the clear stream of reason has not lost its way into the dreary desert of dead habit".

There is a resonance to these words. We refuse to believe that the CD has irretrievably lost its way into "the dreary desert of dead habit". We hold to our conviction that reason and generosity of spirit will prevail and that our membership of this body will very shortly become a reality.

The PRESIDENT (translated from French): I thank the representative of Ireland for her statement and for the kind words addressed to the Chair. I now call on the Director of International Security in the United Kingdom Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Mr. Gomersall, to make his statement.

Mr. GOMERSALL (United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland): Mr. President, it is a great honour for me to address this Conference, and may I begin by thanking you for your welcome and extending to you, on behalf of the United Kingdom delegation, our warmest congratulations on your assumption of the CD presidency? Let me assure you of the fullest support and cooperation of this delegation as you undertake this vital role at this particularly challenging time.

I would like to take this opportunity to set out briefly the United Kingdom's current priorities in the field of non-proliferation and disarmament. But before doing so I should like to say a word about the Conference's work programme.

(Mr. Gomersall, United Kingdom)

Let me record, in the strongest terms, the serious disappointment and regret of the United Kingdom that the Conference finds itself still without a work programme for 1999 and facing the prospect of a third unproductive, wasted year.

It is particularly hard to understand this when last summer, after many months of painstaking consultations, the Conference struck a compromise which enabled it to make a start on substantive work. But at the beginning of this year, this carefully wrought compromise was discarded and the wrangling began all over again. The United Kingdom remains at a loss to understand what occurred between the ending of last year's session and the start of this year's session to explain this extraordinary leap backwards.

We also regret that the Conference has also failed to agree on any further expansion of its membership. The United Kingdom continues to support the admission of all applicants as soon as possible.

Nonetheless, the United Kingdom has sought to engage constructively to rebuild the consensus which has been so carelessly thrown away. We have been, and we remain, prepared to give serious consideration to any proposal which will bring this about. We have listened carefully to the concerns of other delegations and studied seriously their proposals. Having done so, and in the apparent absence of any other proposal which seemed likely to offer a realistic prospect of attracting consensus, we joined with the United States and France to put forward a package, contained in CD/1586.

I will not repeat the arguments in favour of this approach, which were set out by the distinguished Ambassador of the United States when he introduced this proposal here last week. Let me simply urge delegations to give it serious consideration. We believe that our joint proposal offers a balanced, realistic and practical way forward. We are ready to discuss the details in a spirit of compromise. It is well past time for this Conference to get down to work.

As I said at the outset, I would now like to set out the United Kingdom's main priorities, for the CD and beyond.

First, the fissile material cut-off treaty (FMCT). In case there are any who still doubt it, let me reaffirm once again the United Kingdom's commitment to the immediate start and early conclusion of FMCT negotiations.

The most shameful aspect of the Conference's performance this year is its failure to respond to the consensus call of the United Nations General Assembly last year, in resolution 53/77 I, for negotiations on an FMCT. The nuclear-weapons States are regularly accused of putting obstacles in the path of progress on nuclear disarmament. But in this case, the obstacles are plainly not of our making.

(Mr. Comersall, United Kingdom)

It is not my intention now to set out the United Kingdom position on the key substantive aspects of an FMCT. We await only the first meeting of an ad hoc committee in order to do so. We continue to hope that we will be able to set it out soon in such a setting.

But, since it still seems to be in question, let me repeat once again what we see as the important benefits which an FMCT would deliver to the international community. In doing so, let me also be clear that I am referring here to a treaty based on the Shannon mandate, which has been faithfully reflected in the General Assembly resolution, which would ban the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices.

Such a treaty will put a worldwide, verifiable and legally binding end to such production. Some argue that this is useless as the nuclear-weapons States already have stocks so large that they do not need any more. There are three reasons why such arguments are wrong. First, only some of the States capable of producing such fissile material have announced that they have ended production. At least some of the others, it may be inferred, are still producing it. Further proliferation is still a real threat. As long as we are without an FMCT, such production and proliferation can continue. Second, those States which have stopped production have announced only voluntary ends to production. These need to be locked into place by legally binding commitments, while consensus exists to do so. Without an FMCT, production could resume if circumstances changed. Third, the ending of production currently in effect in a number of States is, for the most part, unverified. Only an effectively verifiable FMCT can provide real confidence that production has indeed ceased.

It is also argued that an FMCT which bans only future production of fissile material will not contribute to nuclear disarmament. This is patently not true. A production cut-off is an important and essential step. It is clearly not the last step. But to refuse to start FMCT negotiations unless negotiations on nuclear disarmament begin in parallel is self-defeating. And the negotiation of such a treaty was of course one of the key decisions taken at the 1995 NPT Review and Extension Conference.

Before there can be an effective worldwide verifiable ban on all nuclear weapons, there has to be confidence that no new fissile material for such weapons can be produced. This is what an FMCT would establish. In doing so, it would generate a climate conducive to forward progress towards the goal of the elimination of all nuclear weapons, as well as offering a stabilizing influence in otherwise unstable regions.

An effective FMCT will put in place an essential foundation for the achievement of global nuclear disarmament. Adding linkages or trying to expand the scope of the treaty can only serve to set back the cause of nuclear disarmament, not to promote it. The United Nations General Assembly, by consensus, has recognized this and called upon the CD to get down to work, and this Conference should heed that call.

(Mr. Gomersall, United Kingdom)

May I now turn to nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament more broadly? Last July, the United Kingdom announced the results of the Strategic Defence Review, which included significant further reductions in our nuclear forces. The main elements were set out for the Conference by our Ambassador, Ian Soutar, in a statement here on 30 July 1998 and have been widely welcomed.

I will not repeat these again now except for one point, which still seems to be called into question: the United Kingdom is committed to the goal of nuclear disarmament and has made clear that, when satisfied with progress towards this, it will ensure that our remaining nuclear weapons are included in multilateral negotiations. To this end, we welcome the steps being taken by some of the other nuclear-weapons States and, in particular, we look for the early ratification of START II and the commencement of negotiations on START III.

We also look for the early entry into force of the Comprehensive Nuclear Test-Ban Treaty and hope that the Article XIV Conference to be held later this year will promote that objective. It is a matter of regret that while 152 States have signed the CTBT, only 32 have thus far ratified it. We call upon all States, especially those of the 44 States whose ratification is needed for the treaty to enter into force, to take action as soon as possible. We call in particular on India and Pakistan to sign and ratify the CTBT, and to take the other steps called for in Security Council resolution 1172.

Some progress was made at the recent NPT PrepCom meeting on arrangements for next year's Review Conference. Obviously, we would have wished to have seen the PrepCom make recommendations on substantive issues, but sadly this was not possible despite the positive role played by Ambassador Reyes in what were trying circumstances. We are now taking stock of the outcome of the PrepCom, but firmly intend to do everything we can in the coming months to ensure that next year's Review Conference is a success.

On the subject of conventional weapons, in the same way that we look for progress in the nuclear field, the United Kingdom would like to see the CD take forward work on a number of conventional disarmament issues. Conventional arms - anti-personnel landmines, small arms and light weapons in particular - are without doubt the real killers of today, responsible for the deaths of countless hundreds of thousands of people, many of them civilians, women and children. This Conference has a real opportunity to make a tangible difference in this field and, in so doing, go some way towards halting this cruel and pointless waste of life.

Nowhere is that opportunity more evident than in the case of anti-personnel landmines. The CD is in a prime position to help strengthen existing international instruments against the use, production and export of anti-personnel landmines. The negotiation of a ban on the transfer of anti-personnel landmines would, we believe, have the important advantage of bringing a number of countries who have yet to accede to the Ottawa Convention and other legally binding instruments a few vital steps closer towards the

(Mr. Somersall, United Kingdom)

ultimate goal of a total anti-personnel landmine ban. The United Kingdom therefore firmly supports the establishment of an ad hoc committee to begin negotiation of such a ban.

Regrettably, however, we recognize that the establishment of an ad hoc committee appears, for the time being at least, to be out of reach. We have consequently supported calls for the reappointment of a special coordinator on anti-personnel landmines. The United Kingdom sincerely hopes that such a modest goal is attainable.

Many of you have just taken part in a preparatory meeting to lay the groundwork for the first annual conference of States parties to amended Protocol II to the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons, which will be held here in December. In the same way that we urge action on a transfer ban, the United Kingdom will support efforts to expand the limited transfer ban contained in the amended Protocol II.

Needless to say, the United Kingdom remains firmly committed to the Ottawa Convention and to action to reinforce the obligations contained therein. In line with decisions taken recently in Maputo at the First Meeting of States Parties to the Convention, we look forward to co-chairing the Standing Committee on Mine Clearance here in Geneva in a few months' time. We will encourage participation by as wide a number of States as possible.

By supporting a range of complementary activities on APLs the United Kingdom aims to encourage comprehensive and rapid progress towards our ultimate goal - a world free of these weapons. We see clear benefits in pursuing work across the spectrum: there should be no exclusivity. We hope others agree with this.

In the same vein that we urge the CD to undertake work on APLs, the United Kingdom also fully supports the reappointment of a special coordinator - in the absence of an ad hoc committee - on transparency in armaments.

On combating the proliferation of small arms and light weapons, the United Kingdom's track record speaks, I hope, for itself. We have worked, and continue to work, vigorously in appropriate forums to prevent the illicit trafficking of small arms, and to ensure the removal and, where possible, destruction of surplus weapons from affected societies. The United Kingdom is committed to a responsible and transparent policy on legal transfers of small arms. We would commend to all gathered here the EU's Joint Action - which continues to attract support beyond the shores of Europe - and, of course, its Code of Conduct on Arms Exports. Be assured that the United Kingdom stands ready to consider other international initiatives and to extend assistance to affected countries.

Finally, let me take this opportunity to emphasize the importance which the United Kingdom attaches to the early, successful conclusion of an effective protocol to strengthen the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention.

(Mr. Gomersall, United Kingdom)

The threat to global and regional security posed by biological weapons is real and has been graphically demonstrated by revelations in Iraq over the last few years. Strong and urgent international action is needed to strengthen the ban on these weapons, in particular by providing effective means of verification. We believe that this is possible and it is now a matter of political will to overcome the remaining essentially political obstacles.

The United Kingdom considers that negotiations on this protocol should continue to be a high priority for the international community this year. To this end, we are committed actively to promote and support the work of the Ad Hoc Group, with a view to achieving substantive progress by the end of 1999, so that the protocol can be adopted and opened for signature next year. We have already offered to host the signing ceremony in London next summer and eagerly look forward to doing so.

In conclusion, I hope that the set of priorities which I have just set out demonstrates at least two things. First, that the United Kingdom is firmly committed to playing its full part in national, regional and international efforts to promote non-proliferation and disarmament. Secondly, that the outstanding agenda of pressing issues in the CD needs to be addressed urgently. This Conference has been charged with the heavy responsibility, in the interests of strengthening international peace and security, of making real progress on these issues. The stakes are too high for the Conference to delay any longer before delivering on its mandate.

The PRESIDENT (translated from French): I thank the representative of the United Kingdom for his statement and the kind words addressed to the Chair. I now give the floor to the representative of China, Ambassador Li Changhe.

Mr. LI (China) (translated from Chinese): Mr. President, on behalf of the Chinese delegation and in my own name, I would like to congratulate you most warmly on your assumption of the presidency of the Conference on Disarmament (CD). We are quite confident that your outstanding diplomatic skills, rich experiences and in-depth understanding of the work of the CD would benefit the CD greatly. In discharging the important task of the CD presidency, you can rest assured of the full cooperation of my delegation. I would also like to take this opportunity to pay tribute to your predecessor Ambassador Mr. Nguyen Quy Binh of Viet Nam, and extend our thanks and appreciation for his tireless efforts in pushing the CD forward. But fundamentally speaking, the ability of the CD to make substantive progress is closely related to the international peace and security situation which has a direct bearing on disarmament affairs. It also depends on concerted efforts by all the CD members while taking into account each other's concerns and demonstrating necessary flexibilities.

The CD has entered the 13th week of this year's session. However, we have not yet been able to agree on the programme of work because of the divergent views on the two agenda items, namely "Nuclear Disarmament"

(Mr. Li, China)

and "Prevention of an Arms Race in Outer Space" (PAROS). The impasse on this procedural matter reflects the profound divergence over substantive issues among relevant countries or country groups. The Chinese delegation, while finding the situation deeply regrettable and worrisome, has given some thought to the reasons underlining the situation and possible ways out of it. Today, I would like to share with colleagues some of the perspectives of my delegation.

I would like to stress that, the developments in recent years, especially since the beginning of this year, which are detrimental to the international peace and security, have exerted grave and negative impact on the disarmament process.

Just as we cannot breathe in vacuum, the work of the CD cannot be isolated from the overall international security environment. The disarmament process is closely related to international peace and the security interests of all countries. They are interactive and mutually promoting.

During the cold war, the arms race kept on escalating and it was impossible to make any major progress in disarmament. In the wake of the cold war and the ending of confrontations between the two military blocs, the relations between the major Powers eased. All peace-loving countries, including China, fervently hoped that our planet could be free from the nightmares of both "cold war" and "hot war", and continuous progress in disarmament could be made in a healthy international security environment, thus promoting international peace and security and as the economic and social development of all countries so that the world in the twenty-first century might be one of peace, development and common prosperity for mankind.

Against this backdrop, the international arms control and disarmament process has been offered an unprecedented "window of opportunity". Thanks to the efforts and cooperation of all parties, particularly with widespread support among the developing countries, some major achievements have been notched up, such as the conclusion of the CWC in 1992, the signing of the START II by US and Russia in 1993, the indefinite extension of the NPT in 1995, the commencement of the negotiations of the Protocol to strengthen the BWC, the conclusion of the CTBT, and the amended Landmine Protocol of the CCW, in 1996.

The CD played an important and unforgettable role in negotiating and concluding the CWC and the CTBT.

It was against this historical background that the UNGA adopted the resolution on FMCT under which the CD established an Ad Hoc Committee in 1995.

After the conclusion of the CTBT, it had been expected that negotiations on FMCT would commence and progress could be made on other important disarmament issues as well, especially on nuclear disarmament.

(Mr. Li, China)

It had also been expected that progress in disarmament would be conducive to a further easing of the international situation, promoting world peace and further enhancing all countries' security environments and that a favourable international environment would in turn promote progress on disarmament, thus creating a virtuous circle.

Unfortunately, the improvement in world peace and security has not kept pace as expected. Dark clouds have gathered after a brief spell of sunshine. In recent years, particularly this year, disturbing developments in the international arena, like darkening clouds, have overshadowed the peace and disarmament process.

Just as President Jiang Zemin of China pointed out in his statement at the CD plenary on 26 March, while there are positive factors which are conducive to the relaxation of the global situation and peace and development, there still exist some negative elements which cannot be ignored, i.e. the cold war mentality still lingers on and power politics manifest themselves from time to time; the tendency toward closer military alliance is on the rise; new forms of "gunboat policy" are rampant.

This concise but comprehensive statement of President Jiang has been corroborated by the developments in the past two months. I am referring to the wanton bombing of Yugoslavia by the Military Alliance led by one super-Power. Over 1,000 military aircraft have been used in air strikes, tens of thousands tons of bombs have been dropped, and thousands of missiles launched at one small country. New types of weapons with mass killing capacity, including cluster bombs and radioactive depleted uranium projectiles have been used. Many civilian facilities, such as hospitals, schools, bridges, railways, roads, airports, power plants and TV stations have been hit and destroyed, causing thousands of civilian casualties and rendering nearly a million refugees homeless. Chemical plants, fertilizer factories and oil refinery plants have been attacked, causing the leakage of toxic chemicals and resulting in serious ecological disasters and threatening the lives and health of people in Yugoslavia and neighbouring countries.

This is flagrant military intervention against a sovereign State. It not only undermines peace in the Balkans but also upsets the tranquillity of the world. Even the Chinese Embassy in Belgrade has been bombed, grossly violating international law and the norms governing international relations.

This military bloc, a typical product of the cold war, did not disappear from the world scene with the end of the cold war, but has been further expanded. Moreover, while carrying on the air strike against Yugoslavia, this bloc has declared a "New Strategic Concept", transforming itself from a defensive military organization to a military one of offensive nature which can extend its military operations to areas beyond its borders and use military force without United Nations authorization. Its attack on Yugoslavia in disregard of the United Nations is thus a "trial run" for its "new strategic concept". Plainly, if such perverse acts continue, the

(Mr. Li, China)

international community will see more such military interventions and attacks against countries which assert their sovereignty and oppose hegemonism and power politics. If that is the case, the norms governing international relations and the security framework based on the United Nations Charter, which was established after the Anti-Fascism War, will be seriously undermined.

Under such circumstances, countries outside military alliances will be deprived of basic security, so how can we anticipate any progress in the field of arms control and disarmament? If the many small and weak countries are pushed to the wall, how can they be convinced to support international non-proliferation regimes?

It is more than clear that the practice of hegemonism, power politics and "gunboat diplomacy" is not only positively harmful to world peace and development, but also directly undermines or even reverses the international arms control and disarmament process. This is not a prospect that the international community, including China, wishes to see. However, this is the reality we are confronted with. Whether the "window of opportunity" that opened in the 1990s is to close depends on whether the countries concerned change their course and abide by the United Nations Charter and basic norms governing international relations, respecting all countries' sovereignty and territorial integrity, and doing away with hegemonism, power politics and "gunboat diplomacy". The world is watching.

Secondly, I would like to touch upon the basic concepts to be observed in the international disarmament process. This is also an important factor affecting the progress of work in the CD. In his statement at the CD plenary on 26 March, President Jiang Zemin pointed out that the aim of disarmament is to increase security, and security must be for all countries to enjoy. Disarmament should not become a tool for stronger nations to control weaker ones, still less should it be an instrument for a handful of countries to optimize their armaments in order to seek unilateral superiority in security. To reduce others' arsenals while keeping one's own intact, to reduce the obsolete while developing the state-of-the-art, or even to sacrifice the security of others for one's own security, all these run counter to the fundamental purposes and objectives of disarmament.

China has always held that only just, reasonable and balanced international arms control and disarmament can genuinely promote global peace, security and stability. However, some countries try by innumerable means to limit and reduce other States' weaponry under the cover of arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation while at the same time they never cease to arm themselves with more advanced military technology and equipment, and interfere in other nation's internal affairs and sovereignty by increasingly violent and ruthless military means. On one hand, they exaggerate so-called "missile threats" from developing countries as a pretext for developing their missile defence systems; on the other hand they launch their most advanced missiles at developing countries.

(Mr. Li, China)

Currently, the significant divergence in the positions of CD members on these two agenda items, "Nuclear Disarmament" and PAROS, reflects the different stands of various countries on the objectives and purposes of disarmament.

Everyone supports the re-establishment of an ad hoc committee to negotiate FMCT, so as to promote nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation. At the same time, many member States are of the view that the CD should also take action on Nuclear Disarmament and PAROS by establishing the necessary working mechanisms, such as an ad hoc committee or working group, with appropriate mandates. It is regrettable that up to now this just and reasonable demand has been ignored by some countries, and that, in particular, only one delegation opposes the re-establishment of the Ad Hoc Committee on PAROS.

Many delegations, including the Chinese delegation, believe that the importance of nuclear disarmament and PAROS is no less than that of FMCT. At the beginning of this year, one country breached an existing arms control treaty by announcing its decision to accelerate the research and development of missile defence systems, and to extend its weapon systems into outer space. The aim of such a programme is to seek absolute military dominance. It will certainly have a negative impact on the bilateral and multilateral nuclear disarmament processes, and on global strategic security and stability in the twenty-first century as well. This makes the CD's deliberation on PAROS ever more relevant and pressing.

To sum up, the agenda items of "Nuclear Disarmament", NSA, FMCT and PAROS are interrelated and should be addressed as a whole. Singling out any one item while excluding the others is unjustified and unhelpful.

My delegation reiterates that the CD should re-establish the Ad Hoc Committee on PAROS. Progress in this area, just like progress on a working mechanism for nuclear disarmament, will be conducive to progress in formulating an integrated work programme acceptable to all. It is the sincere hope of the Chinese delegation that matters will take a favourable turn during the second half of the 1999 session.

The PRESIDENT (translated from French): I thank the representative of China for his statement and the kind words he addressed to me. We have come to the end of the list of speakers. Would any other delegations like to take the floor at this stage?

As you know, I have already started a process of intensive consultation in order to produce a consensus on the work programme of the Conference, on the basis of all the proposals that have been presented individually by delegations or by groups of delegations. We are all aware that agreement on the programme of work calls for the devising of a balanced compromise with regard to appropriate mechanisms to address the issue of nuclear disarmament and the prevention of an arms race in space. This is why I shall endeavour, over the coming days, to seek formulas that are acceptable to all delegations,

(The President)

which I hope will enable us to start on our substantive work without further delay. In that regard, I would like once again to seek your assistance, to ask for your help, and to be able to count on the support and the flexibility of all delegations so that this task, which is difficult in itself, will lead us to something that will enable us to make headway and help the Conference progress if agreement is in sight. This morning we have heard words of anxiety, concern at the fact that our work has not commenced yet, and this is a matter of our collective responsibility.

The next plenary meeting of the Conference will be held on Thursday, 3 June at 10 a.m.

The meeting rose at 11.30 a.m.